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SUBJECT: VATICAN SEES KAZAKH-SPONSORED WORLD RELIGIOUS CONGRESS AS IMPORTANT STEP FORWARD FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

REFTEL: VATICAN 4289

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) HOLY SEE DIPLOMATS WHO ATTENDED THE SEPTEMBER 24-25 CONGRESS OF WORLD AND TRADITIONAL NATIONAL RELIGIONS IN ASTANA, KAZAKHSTAN REGARD THE FORUM AS AN IMPORTANT STEP FORWARD FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE. THE HOLY SEE, WHICH HAS BEEN ACTIVELY PROMOTING SUCH A DIALOGUE FOR DECADES, WELCOMED THE INITIATIVE AS A SIGNAL THAT THEIR EFFORTS ARE BEARING FRUIT WITHIN THE ISLAMIC WORLD. RECOGNIZING THIS, THE HOLY SEE SENT A HIGH-POWERED DELEGATION WITH TWO CARDINALS, AN ARCHBISHOP AND TWO OTHER HIGH-LEVEL CURIA OFFICIALS. THE VATICAN'S GROWING DETERMINATION TO ADVANCE INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE MAKES IT AN IMPORTANT U.S. PARTNER IN OUR EFFORT TO OVERCOME PERCEPTIONS OF RELIGIOUS MYOPIA IN THE U.S. AND RELIGIOUS DIVISION BETWEEN THE WEST AND THE ISLAMIC WORLD. END SUMMARY.

SPIRIT OF ASSISI REACHES ALMATY

12. (SBU) THE CONGRESS OF WORLD AND TRADITIONAL NATIONAL RELIGIONS IN ASTANA, KAZAKHSTAN SEPT. 23-24 WAS AN IMPORTANT STEP IN INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND "LAID THE GROUNDWORK" FOR FUTURE ADVANCES, ACCORDING TO VATICAN DELEGATE JOZEF MAJ OF THE HOLY SEE'S PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROMOTION OF CHRISTIAN UNITY. THE GATHERING -- ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT IN A PREDOMINANTLY MUSLIM COUNTRY IN RECENT TIMES -- BROUGHT TOGETHER REPRESENTATIVES FROM 17 FAITHS AND DENOMINATIONS, INCLUDING ISLAM, JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, SHINTO, HINDUISM, AND BUDDHISM, FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND DISCUSSIONS ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION. HIGH-LEVEL ATTENDEES INCLUDED THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE AND THE CHIEF RABBI OF ISRAEL. ARCHBISHOP TOMASZ PETA OF ASTANA DESCRIBED THE MEETING, WHICH WAS PROMOTED AND ORGANIZED BY PRESIDENT NURSULTAN NARZABAYEV, AS "A FRUIT OF THE POPE'S VISIT" TO KAZAKHSTAN IN 2001, DURING WHICH THE POPE EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF DIALOGUE BETWEEN RELIGIONS AS A SIGNIFICANT INSTRUMENT FOR BUILDING PEACE. IT ALSO REFLECTED THE SPIRIT OF INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, WHICH THE POPE FIRST LAUNCHED IN A 1986 MEETING IN ASSISI AND CONTINUED WITH A 2002 ASSISI MEETING AFTER THE SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACKS.

13. (SBU) THE CONFERENCE PRODUCED A JOINT DECLARATION CALLING FOR DIALOGUE, TOLERANCE, AND EDUCATION IN THE PROMOTION OF PEACE WHILE CONDEMNING EXTREMISM, TERRORISM, AND OTHER FORMS OF VIOLENCE IN THE NAME OF RELIGION. THE DECLARATION, DISCUSSIONS, AND COMMON PRAYER DURING THE EVENT, MAJ BELIEVED, REPRESENTED AN IMPORTANT "START" WITHIN MULTI-CONFESSIONAL COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL ASIA TO FOSTER RECONCILIATION AND UNDERSTANDING. DELEGATES AGREED IN THE DECLARATION TO CONVENE AT LEAST EVERY THREE YEARS IN A SIMILAR FORUM, AND DESIGNATED KAZAKHSTAN TO ORGANIZE THE NEXT MEETING IN THREE YEARS TIME.

NEEDED EXAMPLE IN A TOUGH NEIGHBORHOOD

14. (SBU) JULIO MURAT, THE HOLY SEE'S OFFICE DIRECTOR FOR KAZAKHSTAN, WHO WAS ALSO PART OF THE VATICAN'S DELEGATION TO THE CONFERENCE, TOLD US HE ATTACHED GREAT SIGNIFICANCE TO THE FACT THAT THE CONFERENCE WAS HELD IN A PREDOMINANTLY MUSLIM, POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRY IN CENTRAL ASIA. "THE NEIGHBORHOOD NEEDS THIS KIND OF EXAMPLE," MURAT SAID. HE SAW A DESIRE ON THE PART OF THE NAZARBAYEV GOVERNMENT TO AVOID "FANATICISM AND AN ISLAMICIZED SOCIETY" AND HE HOPED ITS EXAMPLE COULD INFLUENCE OTHER COUNTRIES SUCH AS SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN AND, IN TIME, CONTRIBUTE TO BUILDING A LESS FERTILE ENVIRONMENT FOR TERRORISM. KAZAKH PRESIDENT NAZARBAYEV NOTED THE LINK BETWEEN INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY IN HIS REMARKS TO THE CONFERENCE, AND ALMATY RABBI ELKHANAN KOGEN WAS QUOTED IN THE PRESS DURING THE EVENT ACCENTING ITS ANTI-TERRORISM

THEME.

VATICAN DELEGATION REFLECTS POPE'S COMMITMENT

15. (SBU) THE HOLY SEE'S HIGH-POWERED PRESENCE AT THE KAZAKHSTAN CONGRESS REFLECTED THE PRIORITY THE HOLY SEE CURRENTLY PLACES ON EXPANDING SUCH A DIALOGUE AND THEIR

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SITED BY THE POPE.
THE HOLY SEE DELEGATION WAS LED BY CARDINAL JOZEF TOMKO, PREFECT EMERITUS OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES. THE DELEGATION ALSO INCLUDED CARDINAL RENATO MARTINO, PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, ASTANA ARCHBISHOP TOMASZ PETA, ARCHBISHOP PIER LUIGI CELATA, THE NUMBER TWO IN THE VATICAN'S COUNCIL FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, MONSIGNOR MAJ FROM THE COUNCIL FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY, AND A MONSIGNOR MARAT FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. IN HIS REMARKS, TOMKO EMPHASIZED THE SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITY OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO COLLABORATE TO ELIMINATE CAUSES OF TERRORISM, PROMOTE HUMAN DIGNITY AND UNITY AMONG PEOPLES. HE ALSO HIGHLIGHTED THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION IN ENSURING THAT CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES ARE NOT PROMOTED IN OPPOSITION TO OTHERS.

COMMENT

16. (SBU) THOUGH THE MEETING WAS KAZAKH-SPONSORED, THE HOLY SEE CAN JUSTIFIABLY CLAIM A ROLE IN ITS GENESIS, GIVEN THE POPE'S PIONEERING ROLE IN DEVELOPING THIS TYPE OF CONFERENCE. AS ALMATY ARCHBISHOP PETA OBSERVED, "WE ARE HAPPY THAT OUR CIVIL AUTHORITIES RECOGNIZE THE POPE AS A MAJOR MORAL AUTHORITY AT THE WORLD LEVEL AND THAT THEY HAVE UNDERTAKEN THIS INITIATIVE IN KEEPING WITH THE SPIRIT OF ASSISI WHERE THE FIRST INTER-RELIGIOUS MEETING FOR PEACE WAS HELD." THE VATICAN-ASSOCIATED NGO SANT'EGIDIO ALSO ORGANIZES AN ANNUAL SERIES OF INTER-RELIGIOUS MEETINGS WITH A SIMILAR FORMAT (REFTEL) THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO A NORMALIZATION OF SUCH DIALOGUES. CATHOLIC DOCUMENTS ON INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE ARE SOME OF THE MOST DEVELOPED, AND WERE FREQUENTLY CITED DURING THE CONFERENCE. VATICAN OFFICIAL HAVE TOLD US THAT EXPANDING THIS DIALOGUE IS CURRENTLY ONE OF THE VATICAN'S HIGHEST INTERNATIONAL PRIORITIES. WE CAN THEREFORE EXPECT THE HOLY SEE TO REMAIN A KEY PARTNER IN OUR EFFORT TO BUILD INTER-RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING AND DEVELOP AN ACTIVE DIALOGUE WITH THE MUSLIM WORLD. AS MURAT CONCLUDED, "THERE SEEMS TO BE MOMENTUM ON THE ISSUE." END COMMENT.

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